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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHISINAU 000659

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STATE FOR EUR/UMB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [MD](#)  
SUBJECT: WHO WANTS ION STURZA TO BE PRESIDENT?

Classified by: Charge Marcus Micheli for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

REF: Chisinau 644

¶1. (C) Summary: In response to a question at an August 4 press conference, Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) leader Vlad Filat said that former PM Ion Sturza had all the qualities needed to be a good President, thus launching a Sturza-for-President rumor that has rapidly gained traction. Filat is reportedly close to Sturza (he served as State Minister in Sturza's government), and Sturza also is a business partner of the President's son, Oleg Voronin. While President Voronin has stated that the Communist Party (PCRM) would not support Alliance for European Integration candidate Marian Lupu for President, he also has said that the PCRM could support a non-party Alliance candidate. The unaffiliated Sturza therefore could become a compromise candidate for Filat and Voronin should the Alliance fail to muster the necessary votes to elect Lupu. In fact, Lupu told the Ambassador recently (reftel) that he was concerned that Filat was planning to support Sturza in a second round of presidential voting. End Summary.

Creating Reality by Denying a Rumor  
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¶2. (SBU) The Sturza story made its public debut on August 4, when the headlines following a press conference proclaimed that Vlad Filat had declared that "Ion Sturza could be a very good President for Moldova." It turned out that Filat, in response to a journalist's question, had also said he did not think Sturza would return to politics (since Sturza was Deputy Director of the Rompetrol company), but the headline was a surprise given that at a time the four-party Alliance was negotiating top positions and had indicated it planned to nominate Lupu for President.

¶3. (SBU) On August 5, Sturza denied having any interest in the presidency, although he confirmed that several acquaintances had called him to discuss the subject. But the rumor was officially launched, and gained further traction when on August 10, Filat and Sturza were seen having lunch together at a prominent downtown restaurant. The next day Filat denied that the two had discussed nominating Sturza for President, saying it was just two old friends meeting for lunch. (Note: Sturza no doubt had a lot to tell Filat about coalition formation, having participated in the Alliance for Democratic and Reform which failed in 1999.)

¶4. (SBU) Then on August 14, Sturza announced that

he had resigned from his position as Deputy Director of Rompetrol. While this move reportedly was planned two years in advance to take effect September 1 (in connection with the transfer of shares to Kazakhstan partners,) it was seen here by many as further evidence that Sturza was making himself available to play a role in the new government.

Sturza Links: The Filat Connection  
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15. (C) Adding more fuel to the rumor, Filat is reportedly very close to Sturza, having served as Minister of State in 1999, when the latter was Prime Minister. Both the men and their two wives are close friends, and press reports in 2008 suggested that the two families vacationed together in Austria. We have also heard allegations (which we cannot independently confirm or reject) that the very wealthy Sturza has provided some of the financial backing for Filat's political party and its electoral campaign.

Sturza Links: The Voronin Connection  
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16. (C) At the same time, Sturza is reportedly also close to Oleg Voronin, the President's son, who has become one of Moldova's wealthiest businessmen. The two were partners in FinComBank: Oleg Voronin was one of the founders of the bank

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in 1993, while Ion Sturza served as Chairman of its Board from 1996-98. Oleg Voronin is now a FinComBank shareholder, and his father reportedly also owns shares in the bank. According to Wikipedia, FinComBank controls the monthly payments for the national phone company Moldtelecomm, and processes the salaries of the key ministries such as Ministry of the Interior and Defense. We have heard that through administrative pressures, most state structures have been forced to transfer their accounts to FinComBank.

The Sturza Scenario: Dark Horse Waiting in the Wings  
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17. (C) The Alliance for European Integration has already determined that it will nominate Filat for Speaker and Lupu for President, and it appears that Lupu will be the coalition's candidate in the first round of Presidential voting which may take place on September 10. However, Voronin has stated both privately and publicly that he would not permit the PCRM to vote for Lupu (who he views as a traitor) or for that matter to a candidate representing a political party. Without the PCRM, the Alliance will fall eight votes short of the 61 needed to elect its candidate, which would necessitate a second round of voting within 15 days.

18. (C) As Sturza does not belong to a political party, some observers have begun to speculate that Voronin could be persuaded to lend PCRM votes to support a candidate such as Sturza in this second round vote. (According to this scenario, after a failed vote on Lupu, Filat could propose that the Alliance nominate Sturza). And in fact, as reported reftel, Lupu confided to the Ambassador recently that he was concerned that Filat was

plotting exactly such a move involving Sturza.

¶9. (SBU) The Filat-Sturza scenario has been noted in the press, and an August 15 talk show interview on FLUX TV (controlled by PPCD party Chairman Iurie Rosca), "independent" political analyst Victor Gurau speculated on a future government headed by with Filat as Speaker, Sturza as President, and Zinaida Greceanii as Prime Minister. We note that since Rosca allied with the PCRM in 2005, and particularly more recently since Rosca became Deputy Prime Minister, the PPCD has been known to float proposals that would not be easy for the PCRM to say on its own.

Comment

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¶10. (C) At this point, a Sturza presidential nomination is pure speculation. However, Lupu himself has mentioned the possibility of this scenario unfolding, and if President Voronin knew that his family's business interests would be guaranteed by his son's long-term business partner, he might look with favor upon the idea. But while this scenario could benefit Filat and the PCRM, it might not be acceptable to other members of the four-party Alliance, which means that complex behind-the-scenes negotiations would be needed to bring it to fruition.

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